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PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ON THE BASIS OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 44/228 AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OTHER RELEVANT GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS: CROSS-SECTORAL ISSUES

National mechanisms and international cooperation for capacity-building

(Section IV, Chapter 5 of Agenda 21)

Report of the Secretary-General of the Conference

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Preparatory Committee decision 3/2. Where applicable, capacity-building is addressed in each programme area. Several chapters of Agenda 21 constitute essential elements of capacity-building including: Integration of environment and development in decision-making (sect. I, chap. 7); Transfer of environmentally sound technology (sect. IV, chap. 2); Science for sustainable development (sect. IV, chap. 3); and Promoting education, training and public awareness (sect. IV, chap. 4). 1/ The synthesis of national reports (A/CONF.151/PC/98) is also relevant to this issue in its consideration of the importance of political, economic, socio-cultural and eco-geographical realities and specificities. Therefore, this chapter is limited in its focus to the overall national and international enabling processes, especially technical cooperation, needed to strengthen and build national capacity for environment and development. 2/

II. PROGRAMME AREA

Basis for action

2. The ability of a country to follow sustainable development paths is determined to a large extent by the capacity of its people and its institutions. Specifically, capacity-building encompasses the country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities. A fundamental goal of capacity-building is to enhance the ability to evaluate and address the crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among development options, understanding the environmental potentials and limits and the needs as perceived by the people of the country concerned. As a result, the need to strengthen national capacities is shared by all countries.

3. Building endogenous capacity 3/ to implement Agenda 21 will require the efforts of countries themselves in partnership with the international community. Technical cooperation encompasses the whole range of activities to develop or strengthen individual and group capacities through the improvement in the level of skills, knowledge and technical know-how. This is a prerequisite of institution-building and improved policy analysis and development management, including the assessment of alternative courses of action. In this context, technical cooperation should serve the purpose of long-term capacity-building, and needs to be managed and coordinated by the developing countries themselves. Technical cooperation is effective only when it is derived from and related to a developing country's own strategies and priorities on environment and development and if assistance agencies and national governments can agree on improved and more consistent policies and procedures to support this process.

A. Objectives

4. The overall objective of this programme area is to acquire, develop and maintain national and related regional capacities for sustainable development, including the non-governmental sectors, achieving inter alia:

(a) The promotion of an ongoing participatory process to define country needs and priorities in promoting Agenda 21 and to place investment in human development and institutions high on the agenda of countries and donors;

(b) The reorientation of the technical cooperation process from supply-based to demand-driven, while improving coordination among providers of assistance to support countries' own programmes of action. This coordination should also include scientific and technological institutions as well as business and industry whenever appropriate;

(c) A shift in time horizons in programme planning, addressing the strengthening of institutional structures to be able to respond to new longer-term challenges rather than concentrating on immediate problems.

5. Specific objectives include the following:

(a) By 1994, each interested country should complete a review of its capacity-building requirements for generating and implementing its own Agenda 21 action programme; 4/

(b) By 1995, a report should be prepared on progress achieved by developing countries, international organizations, environmental and development institutions, donor agencies and non-governmental partners in improved policies, coordination systems and procedures for strengthening the implementation of technical cooperation programmes for sustainable development, as well as on additional measures required to strengthen such cooperation. 5/

B. Activities

1. Build national consensus and formulate capacity-building strategies for implementing Agenda 21

6. As an important aspect of overall planning, each country should seek internal consensus at all levels of society on policies and programmes needed for short- and long-term capacity-building to implement its Agenda 21 programme. This consensus should result from a participatory dialogue of interest groups (stakeholders) and lead to an identification of skill gaps, institutional needs, technological and scientific requirements and resource needs to enhance environmental knowledge and administration and to establish the appropriate linkages with other sectors. The UNDP country programming process should be used to identify requirements for technical cooperation and development assistance for the implementation of Agenda 21, and its Sustainable Development Networks initiative should provide the framework for such cooperation and assistance. 6/

2. Identify national sources and present technical cooperation requests in the framework of sector strategies

7. Developing countries that desire technical cooperation arrangements with international organizations and donor institutions should formulate requests in the framework of long-term sector or subsector capacity-building strategies. Strategies should, inter alia, address policy changes to be implemented, budgetary issues, networking arrangements among institutions, human resource requirements, and technology and equipment requirements. They should cover public and private sector needs and consider strengthening training, educational and research programmes. Countries could designate or establish, if required, a central unit to organize and coordinate technical cooperation, linking it with the priority-setting and resource allocation process.

3. Establish a review mechanism of the aid process

8. Donor and recipient countries, the organizations and institutions of the United Nations system, and international public and private organizations should review the development cooperation process as it relates to technical cooperation activities linked to sustainable development. To facilitate this process, consultations should be undertaken with developing countries, regional organizations, organizations and institutions of the United Nations system and multilateral and bilateral aid and environment agencies, based on the preliminary work carried out by UNDP in preparation for the Conference, with a view to further strengthening the endogenous capacities of developing countries and improving the technical cooperation process. The following aspects should be reviewed:

(a) Evaluation of existing capacity for environmental management including technical and institutional abilities and facilities to assess environmental impact of development projects; evaluation of the abilities to respond and link to the technical cooperation needs of Agenda 21 and the global conventions on climate change and biological diversity;

(b) Assessment of the contribution of existing technical cooperation activities towards strengthening and building national capacity in environmental management and means of improving the quality of external technical cooperation;

(c) A strategy for shifting to a more strategic, capacity-building thrust with longer term commitments, having as a basis the set of national programmes established by each developing country;

(d) Consideration of greater use of long-term cooperative arrangements, such as twinning and "linkage" grants joining together municipalities, non-governmental organizations, universities and research centres, and private institutions with counterparts in other countries or within countries or regions. Programmes such as the Sustainable Development Networks of UNDP should be assessed in this regard;

(e) Strengthening of the sustainability of projects by including in the original project design the costs of institution building, human resource development and technology needs, as well as financial and organizational requirements for operation and maintenance;

(f) Improving the technical cooperation and decision-making process by giving greater attention to capacity-building strategies for environment and development programmes both in country-related coordination processes, such as consultative groups and round-tables, and in sectoral coordination mechanisms to enable developing countries to participate actively in the brokering of assistance from different sources.

4. Enhance the expertise and collective contribution of the United Nations system for capacity-building initiatives

9. Organizations and institutions of the United Nations system together with other international and regional organizations as well as the private sector should establish more joint technical cooperation activities, joint programming exercises and missions to address linked environment and development issues and to ensure coherence and consistency of action. Organizations should establish special networks to assist countries on matters relating to national environmental policies, legislation, natural resources and environmental data.

10. UNDP should play a leading role in mobilizing significant funding for capacity-building utilizing its network of field offices and its broad mandate and experience in the field of technical cooperation. UNDP should at the same time take the lead in forming consultative processes to enhance mobilization and coordination of funds from the international community for capacity-building, including establishing an appropriate database. These additional responsibilities need to be accompanied by strengthening of its own capacities.

11. The national entity in charge of technical cooperation, with the assistance of the UNDP resident representatives, should establish a small group of key actors to steer the process, giving priority to the country's own strategies and priorities. The experience gained in many countries through the preparation of national reports should prove useful in this connection. This should be complemented with information networks and consultations with donor organizations in order to improve coordination, as well as to improve access to the existing body of scientific and technical knowledge and information available in institutions elsewhere.

5. Harmonize the delivery of assistance at the regional level

12. At the regional level, existing organizations should consider the desirability of improved regional and subregional consultative processes and round tables to facilitate the exchange of data, information and experience in the implementation of Agenda 21. UNDP, building on the results of the regional surveys on capacity-building which they carried out at the initiative of the Conference secretariat, 7/ and in collaboration with existing regional, subregional or national organizations with a potential for regional coordination, should operate as a focal point for this purpose, such as the African capacity-building initiative. A periodical review mechanism should be established among the countries of the region with the assistance of the appropriate relevant regional organizations and the participation of the development banks, bilateral aid agencies and non-governmental organizations. Other possibilities are to develop national and regional research and training facilities building on existing regional institutions. 8/

C. Means of implementation

13. Financing and costing: The cost of technical cooperation bilateral expenditures to developing countries is about $15 billion or about 25 per cent of total official development assistance. The implementation of Agenda 21 will require a more effective use of these funds and additional funding in key areas. Specific funding requirements are included in each programme area. Support for the Secretary-General's consultative process will require approximately $1 million.

14. As reflected in paragraph 10, there is a need for a new funding mechanism coordinated by UNDP to provide lead and catalytic funding to give effect to a major capacity-building initiative. Amounts suggested could be in the range of 300-500 million per year, rising over five years to some $1 billion per year. This includes the establishment of a consultative group process that could be managed by UNDP and assisted by a technical advisory committee to mobilize funding from all sources for capacity-building.

Notes

1/ Such building blocks, which are separately addressed in other chapters of Agenda 21 include, inter alia, the following:

(a) The provision of a stimulating environment, political, economic, legal, fiscal and otherwise;

(b) The capacity to mobilize and transfer resources, finance and knowledge in a creative way, in support of sustainable development, including transfer of technologies;

(c) Access to and capacity to process information (economic, technological, scientific and otherwise) including the capacity for sustainable development assessment, based on environmental impact analysis, technology assessment, risk analysis and policy formulation;

(d) The capacity to manage, organize and implement effectively policies, plans, programmes and projects, where organizational, management and technical skills are equally necessary;

(e) The critical mass of hands-on competence in research, development, demonstration, engineering and production, including all levels of support systems and skills, particularly intermediate technical skills, such as required in maintenance and repair;

(f) Basic education - including science and environment - for the masses, with special effort in the education of women, which requires long-term commitment of resources;

Notes (continued)

(g) The capacity to tap into international and regional cooperation networks and institutions concerned with financing, technology transfer, research and training partnerships, advisory services, legal and otherwise, information exchange, etc.

2/ UNDP is preparing a global survey with data on capacity-building needs based on regional and national comprehensive information that will be provided to the Preparatory Committee as a Research Paper. UNDP also launched the Sustainable Development Networks (SDN) which is aimed at building capacities through enhancing information networks among interested parties.

3/ This concept broadens the definition of endogenous capacity established by the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development: "the degree of domestic capability to exercise independent, informed judgement and initiate actions regarding acquisition, deployment and generation of science and technology for economic and social development. This capacity is to be seen in the context of increasing complexity in the ability to manage technological change" (report of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development on its eleventh session, A/CN.11/1991/6, annex II, para. 1).

4/ This review should include current status and needs for change. Many countries have already started this review with the assistance of UNDP.

5/ UNDP is completing national studies that will be ready by 1993.

6/ The national programmes of action should operate as the centrepiece for mobilizing technical cooperation. The generation and implementation of the national Agenda 21 of each country concerned requires the promotion and implementation of an ongoing participatory decision-making process where the relevant stakeholders in development - bankers, entrepreneurs, government authorities, politicians, union leaders, scientists, engineers, peasants and farmers, consumers, representatives of the organized public, including women's groups, etc. - engage in dialogues at various levels and for all sectors of the economy. Such dialogues aim at building a consensus on the needs and priorities for sustainable development and establish a portfolio of priority initiatives or programmes for capacity-building to be implemented through a coalition of resources, domestic and international. The objectives of the national dialogue could be:

(a) To induce policy adjustment necessary to create favourable conditions to bring the sustainable development approaches into the mainstream of thinking, planning and execution of social and economic development;

(b) To identify overlapping and/or conflicting interests among the relevant stakeholders;

(c) To promote a consensus among the stakeholders about the priority initiatives or missions;

(d) To establish enduring mechanisms to make the best use of the available local expertise and existing infrastructure and stimulate building up such resources for the future pursuant to the priorities agreed upon by the stakeholders;

(e) To identify the pattern and effectiveness of resource flows, domestic and international, into sustainable development and establish their adequacy in building endogenous capacity;

(f) To promote a coalition of resources, domestic and international, public and private, for the implementation of the portfolio of priority initiatives or programmes on sustainable development.

7/ As stated in note 2, UNDP has carried out capacity-building and sustainable development regional surveys. The preparation of these regional surveys was done in close consultation with the Governments of each region and with the international agencies operating at the regional level and with the support of the regional development banks. The leading environment and development organizations of each region provided their advice and guidance as to existing professional and institutional capacities in their region and the needs and potential for linking, strengthening and improving such capacities in the environment and development areas to be addressed by the Conference in Agenda 21.

The regional surveys identify:

(a) Major capacity-building requirements for sustainable development and for implementing Agenda 21 in developing countries;

(b) Present skills, existing capabilities and facilities, and potentials for strengthening, improving or expanding them as seen from the perspective of their country and region;

(c) Major institutional and funding gaps;

(d) Policy and legal framework level;

(e) Means for public participation;

(f) Existing facilities for linking institutions within one region with their counterparts in other regions and with external sources of knowledge, experience, expertise, technologies and financial and technical assistance and the needs and potential for expanding such facilities;

(g) Proposals for a programme of action, setting priorities, and institutional and financial options.

Notes (continued)

A full report with the results of the regional surveys will be available by the end of January 1992 and will be presented as a research paper to the Preparatory Committee at its fourth session.

8/ Specific proposals can be also found in document A/CONF.151/100/Add.26 addressing the role of regional organizations and cooperation.